Miracle at Assisi

WORLD RELIGIONS PRAYING FOR PEACE

By Fr. Damian MacPherson, SA

The remarkable success of Assisi 2002 remains fresh in the memory of most who took note of that event. I think many—Roman Catholics especially—would agree that it is just downright difficult to anticipate what Pope John Paul’s next historical initiative will be, given his known passion for Christian unity and his dedicated efforts to interfaith dialogue.

In view of his alphabet of historical firsts, one has to wonder if he has not left a wrinkle of concern in the brows of some in his College of Cardinals, as he places the footprints of the Roman Catholic Church on uncharted territory in the interreligious world.

I would like to suggest another first that possibly is being overlooked. I refer to Pope John Paul’s exercise of a new form of leadership in his invitation to the world religious leaders to Assisi to pray for world peace.

The recent gathering of religious leaders was one of the largest and most representative gatherings ever assembled.

Response to John Paul’s invitation came from 16 churches and ecclesial communities, 30 Muslim clerics from 18 nations, 10 rabbis, and representatives from Buddhism, Tenrikyo, Shintouism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and traditional African religions. In addition, from those religious leaders not represented, there was no known voice of dissent and thus one could only assume agreement with the proceedings.

Without question, gathered there on January 24 in that small town of Assisi was the spoken voice of the world religions. It is not an experience likely to have a repetitious future. The unified response and enthusiastic presence of these representatives to the invitation of John Paul II can be seen as an exercise of a new form of leadership on the part of the Pope.

Clearly, he is respected as the first moral voice of authority in the world today, particularly on issues of international concern for world peace and justice.

Addressing the interreligious assembly in Assisi, the Holy Father spoke the minds of all those gathered when he affirmed that “whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion’s deepest and truest inspiration.”

This new and perhaps unusual expression of leadership on the part of Pope John Paul was fully embraced by Rabbi Israel Singer, secretary of the World Jewish Congress. Rabbi Singer, departing from his prepared text addressed to the Holy Father and the assembled world religious representatives, stated more than...
We commit ourselves to engage in dialogue with sincerity and patience, proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and suffering are diseases of the spirit that can only be cured with love and forgiveness. We commit ourselves to pardon each other's errors and prejudices of the past, and to stand at the side of those who suffer poverty and injustice.

We commit ourselves to promote the culture of dialogue so that understanding and trust may develop among individuals and peoples as these are the conditions of authentic peace. We commit ourselves to defend the right of all human beings to lead a dignified life, in accordance with their cultural identity. We commit ourselves to engage in dialogue with sincerity and patience, without considering what separates us as an insurmountable wall, on the contrary, recognizing that facing our differences can become an occasion for greater reciprocal understanding.

We commit ourselves to pardon each other’s errors and prejudices of the past and present, and to support one another in the common struggle against egoism and abuses, hatred and violence, and in order to learn from the past that peace without justice is not true peace.

We commit ourselves to stand at the side of those who suffer poverty and abandonment, speaking out for those who have no voice and taking concrete action to overcome such situations, in the conviction that no one can be happy alone.

We commit ourselves to make our own the cry of those who do not surrender to violence and evil, and we wish to contribute with all our strength to give a real hope of justice and peace to the humanity of our time.

We commit ourselves to encourage all initiatives that promote friendship between peoples, in the conviction that, if a solid understanding between peoples is lacking, technological progress exposes the world to increasing dangers of destruction and death.

We commit ourselves to ask the leaders of nations to make every possible effort so as to build, at both national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace founded on justice.